The Performance of Normality:

Changing Norms in the American Gothic of Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates

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Introduction

This thesis analyzes the ways in which four American Gothic novels written by Shirley Jackson (1916-1965) and Joyce Carol Oates (1938) explore the perception of normality in American society. The chosen novels were published between the late 1950s and the mid-1990s. In *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), *Expensive People* (1968), and *Zombie* (1995) Jackson and Oates reflect on contemporary social norms through characters and situations that test the limits of these norms.

In sociology "norm" is defined as:

> (…) [A] shared expectation of behavior that connotes what is considered culturally desirable and appropriate. Norms are similar to rules or regulations in being prescriptive, although they lack the formal status of rules. Actual behavior may differ from what is considered normative and, if judged by existing norms, may be deemed deviant. Consequently the concept is intimately linked to issues of social regulation and social control and to the dominant sociological problem of social order. In this sense the idea of what is normative is crucial to lay and sociological understandings of social interaction. The terms norm and normative are, however, also frequently used in a statistical sense to refer to what is common or typical, whether of behavior or some other phenomenon. (*A Dictionary of Sociology*)

In the four novels mentioned above, Jackson and Oates focus specifically on American middle-class norms and values. These works reveal how norms of the dominant culture are transferred.

The functionalist school of sociology "maintains that norms reflect a consensus, a common value system developed through socialization, the process by which an individual

learns the culture of his group. Norms contribute to the functioning of the social system and are said to develop to meet certain assumed 'needs' of the system" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*). However, the consensus creates exclusions. The system works but at the expense of the individuals who do not correspond to the status quo successfully. The culture of the group is often determined by values and norms that are compatible to a pre-existing system put in place by cultural predecessors. A consensus validates the need for policing the standards of normality. In that way, the space for social progress and reform becomes limited.

The value conflict between the dominant culture of the 1950s and the counterculture of the 1960s highlights the limits of the consensus that existed in American society in the postwar period. The domestic ideology of the 1950s saw the nuclear family as the cornerstone of the strong nation. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle note that J. Milton Yinger coined the term "contraculture" and explained that "a contraculture represents a full-fledged oppositional movement with a distinctively separate set of norms and values that are produced dialectically out of a sharply delineated conflict with the dominant society" (7). It was Theodore Roszak who coined the term "counterculture" to define specifically the social and youth movements of the 1960s that seemed to disavow the dominant ideology of postwar America. In his 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture* he explained that the 1960s counterculture stood in opposition to the technocracy of the dominant culture. A technocratic worldview coincides with the functionalization of the human faculties (Roszak xiii).

Jackson and Oates discussed the problems with the dominant culture in their books, each in their own distinguishing literary style. Their lives and careers span the twentieth century, giving a literary overview of social conflicts in the United States. They share

academic foundations; both earned their BA in English from Syracuse University (Jackson in 1940 and Oates in 1960). Their gothic novels reveal that they had similar concerns about the direction in which mainstream American society was heading. They both skillfully used gothic elements in their fiction, which calls attention to the gothic genre's potential to expose the workings of ideology. On a literary level, they are both interested in social exclusion and their protagonists are often outsiders and outcasts; on a personal level, they experienced societal restrictions, Jackson as a female writer in the 1950s and Oates as working-class child in upstate New York (Johnson 2).

According to Bernice M. Murphy, Shirley Jackson was "one of the most prominent female writers of the 1950s" (3). Until the publication of Lenemaja Friedman's study of *Shirley Jackson* (1975) there was little sustained scholarship on Jackson. Jackson marketed herself as "a practicing amateur witch" (qtd. in Murphy12). [1] She used gothic and supernatural tropes in her novels and short stories. At the same time she wrote consistently for mass market magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal.* It was factors like these that initially led academics to dismiss Jackson's texts as works of fiction without much cultural importance. The impact of Jackson's evaluation as not a major writer is reflected even as late as in 2002, when prominent literary critic Harold Bloom claimed that "[Jackson's] art of narration stayed on the surface and could not depict individual identities" (Murphy 6). Similar evaluations are opposed by Murphy, who proposes that Jackson used elements of the gothic genre specifically "in order to skillfully reflect contemporary fears and anxieties" (5). The restrictive social norms of the 1950s shaped and marked Jackson's writing, because they also affected her on a personal level. She had to balance her roles as both a

[1] Murphy quotes from Stanley Hyman's blurb for the publication of Jackson's first novel *The Road Through the Wall* (1948).

writer and a housewife in an era that did not recognize the opportunity for a woman to be a successful professional writer. These restrictions evidently affected her: As a result of her deteriorating psychological and physical health, she died at the age of forty-eight in 1965.

Joyce Carol Oates began her career with the publication of her first novel *With Shuddering Fall* in 1964, shortly before Jackson died. Oates has been an immensely prolific author since then. In her numerous novels and short stories, her topics and choice of genre vary greatly: from boxing in *On Boxing* (1987) to family dramas such as *We Were the Mulvaneys* (1996), and from Gothic in The Gothic Saga (1980-2013) to horror, mystery, and historical novels such as *Blonde* (2000). Oates continues to be a very productive writer publishing work without distinguishing between mediums; alongside her novels she also writes regularly for newspapers and magazines. Her fiction is distinctively American, drawing inspiration from her background and surroundings. Greg Johnson, her biographer, notes that her wide recognition and social mobility is often read as a confirmation of the American Dream (xvii). Meanwhile, she is a keen interpreter of American culture: she openly criticizes materialism and consumerism and has dealt with issues of social unrest in her fiction and articles. Oates has used the critical acclaim she has gained as a professional writer to promote Jackson's work. For example, she has edited the collection *Shirley Jackson: Novels and Stories* (2010) and expressed specific admiration for Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

American Gothic as a Vehicle for Social Critique

Allan Lloyd-Smith shows that the Gothic holds extensive potential for social critique. The gothic genre's foundation lies "in reaction against the optimistic rationalism of its founding era [the Enlightenment], which allowed for a rethinking of the prohibitions and sanctions that

had previously seemed divinely ordained but now appeared to be simply social agreements in the interest of progress and civic stability" (5). The American Gothic follows the general tropes of the genre in which horrific situations are used to let the "real horrors", which are historically situated, become apparent (8). Lloyd-Smith explains that:

> Because Gothic is of its nature extravagant and concerned with the dark side of society, and because it is in some ways freed by its status as absurd fantasy, this form is perhaps more able than realism to incorporate unresolved contractions within the culture, or to express as in dream logic the hidden desires and fears that more considered and "reasonable" perspectives would shrug off or repress. (34)

The Critical Approach

The critical approach used in the first and second chapter of this MA thesis to analyze Jackson's novels is broadly sociological. In the first chapter, Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is approached through sociological research on the Cold War era. Central sociological texts for my analysis of *Hill House* are Wini Breines's *Young, White, and Miserable* (1992) on the plight of young women in postwar American society and Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1990) on middle-class families and family values during the postwar era. The second chapter explores the conditions that led to the 1960s counterculture in America and the background that affected the novel's production, since *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* was published in the beginning of the 1960s. Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969) and research on the mainstream cultural products addressed to teenagers during the 1950s and early 1960s are employed to form the connection. Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* was the first serious and systematic sociological approach to the phenomenon of the counterculture. In his

book, he referred to the people who acknowledged as the prominent figures of the American 1960s counterculture, including Herbert Marcuse, whose thought adds important insight to the discussion of *Castle* and connects it to the analysis of the next chapters.

Herbert Marcuse's critical thought provides the theoretical framework for the analysis of Oates's *Expensive People* and *Zombie* discussed in the third and fourth chapter respectively. In his philosophy of the 1960s Marcuse challenged the foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis, which made a compelling contribution to the intellectual foundation of the 1960s counterculture. *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and a selection of his lectures provide the theoretical framework for the examination of the new subject in late capitalism. Marcuse stresses that "one-dimensional thought" deflates the ability of engaging critically with the purpose of the restrictions advanced industrial societies impose on their citizens (*One-Dimensional Man* 12). This idea of one-dimensionality is central in analyzing the state of the affluent suburbs in postwar America in the third chapter, and of the administered subject in the fourth chapter.

This thesis will show that in the work of Jackson and Oates the normality dictated by the domestic ideology of the postwar era left no space for opposition. The novels' protagonists have to deal with a system that excludes them. Jackson and Oates do not follow the premise that their characters have a fundamental flaw; rather they target their critique on the institutions that lead to their characters' isolation. In that way, they show the need for the social reform of institutions. Norms are shown to be ideologically constructed and thus relative. The consensus is not solely based on objective evaluation, as it also includes the generation of exclusions; these exclusions are telling about the society that generates them.

Chapter one discusses Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. In this novel, the protagonist Eleanor Vance leaves her constrictive home to find adventure in Hill House. She

becomes part of Dr. Montague's parapsychological investigation team where she believes she can start anew. Her wish to finally be accepted as an equal member of a new "family" is not fulfilled, though. The same limits that she experienced in her previous life are repeated, because of the pervasiveness of domestic ideology.

Chapter two discusses Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. In this novel, a young girl, Merricat Blackwood, lives isolated from the local community with the remaining members of her family, her sister Constance and Uncle Julian. It is later revealed that she was responsible for poisoning with arsenic the rest of her family's members, except for her sister Constance, leading to their deaths. In the course of the novel, Merricat once again takes control, in a violent way, in order to remove Cousin Charles, who wants to lay hands on the sisters' property and reduce their autonomy. *Castle* foreshadows the value conflict between the dominant culture and the 1960s countercultures.

Chapter three analyzes Oates's *Expensive People*. This novel is a dark satire of suburban life and overtly criticizes postwar affluent society. Richard Everett and his parents live as "expensive" people: their materialistic interpretation of the American Dream equates freedom with being able to acquire and attend the best in life: a prestigious education, luxurious homes, and pretentious gatherings. However, Richard is constantly ill, and neglected by his parents. At his school, Johns Behemoth, he is being prepared to enter a vast system of functions from which he cannot escape. As a cultural metaphor the biblical monster, Behemoth, is used to describe an extremely powerful, and unstoppable entity. Oates's choice of name for Richard's school is deliberately employed to instill the reader with a sense of foreboding.

Chapter four discusses Oates's *Zombie*. In this novel, the serial killer Quentin P_ seems to be under the complete control of his father, a prominent academic, and the medical

institution. Yet, behind this harmless appearance hides a psychopath who channels his extreme aggressiveness towards his many victims. Oates's novel shows, however, that rather than being a figure of pure evil, Quentin in fact repeats a process of victimization that he is being subjected to himself. Quentin has realized that, as long as he follows the formal procedures to which he is expected to adhere by the authority figures that preside over him, he is left free to continue his search for the perfect "zombie," a young man to lobotomize and keep as a slave.

Chapter 1 The Subversion of the Domestic Ideal in *The Haunting of Hill House*

Contextualizing Hill House

Through Eleanor Vance's gradual collapse, *The Haunting of Hill House* paints a picture of 1950s America as an era marked by duplicity and rigid conformity. The façade of order, affluence, and purity concealed a deeply alienating culture, characterized by the strictness of domestic ideology and incessant fear of anyone who could not adhere to it.

Domestic ideology was revived after the end of World War II (May 11). It reinforced an essentialist conception of gender roles, as an attempt to return to stability and security after the Depression and war. Middle-class prosperity allowed a rapid increase of the number of marriages. Not surprisingly, the age of Americans getting married became significantly lower. In addition, postwar affluence allowed more families to move to the suburbs. Historian William H. Chafe illustrates the picture:

> The astonishing growth of the American economy represented the single most impressive development of the postwar years. The gross national product soared 250 percent between 1945 and 1960…By 1960 per capita income was 35 percent higher than even the boom year of 1945…By the end of the decade 75 percent of American families owned their own car, 87 percent their own TV set, and 75 percent their own washing machine. (112)

Women, even when attending college, were not encouraged to pursue a career but "go steady" (May 119), get married and have babies, while men participated in the emerging white collar economy as the bread-winners. The Baby Boom led to the rapid increase of population.

The house, as a material achievement and a space of containment, was central to the return of domesticity. Due to domestic containment, "public policy, personal behavior, and

even political values were focused on the home" (May 14). In its extreme manifestations, containment reflected fears of a nuclear war, hence "the image of the nuclear family in a nuclear age" (May 3). The Second Red Scare (1947-1954) fuelled the anticommunist hysteria: constant suspicion and censorship expanded to most factors of social life, regardless of their connection to communist sentiments (Chafe 130). The political expression of this stance was McCarthyism.

McCarthyism "was directed against perceived internal dangers, not external enemies" (May 10) and thus supported a combination of restrictive familial values and excessive fears of one's family members. In order to avoid any deviation from the contemporary norm, children's upbringing acquired new importance. Erich Fromm, a prominent social psychologist of the era, stated that the family as an "agency of society" has the function of producing individuals pre-adapted to that society (Ingleby xxxvi). The standards set by the affluent society alarmed parents, especially mothers, about their children's behavior. Edgar Z. Friedenberg noted in his work *The Vanishing Adolescent* (1959) that the new "appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding" became the teenager, a new sociological category. In that way public paranoia about juvenile delinquency allowed people to "vent their fearful or hostile feelings and declare themselves on the side of order and authority" (Friedenberg qtd. in Breines 8).

Young women faced an additional challenge, due to the contradictory messages they received about their expected social roles. In popular culture, sex was extensively commercialized, while sexual puritanism prevailed within the family (Breines 87). Later in the early 1960s, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) showcased the "problem" that was never addressed openly: middle-class married women were depressed and discontented because they felt constricted in the only respected roles of wife and mother.

Chafe shows that marriage was the prerequisite for a fulfilled life: “College newspapers described young coeds as distraught if they were not engaged by their senior year, young women told public pollsters that they looked forward to four or more children, and women’s magazines presented an image of women as ‘daily content in a world of bedroom, kitchen, sex, babies and home’” (124).

Middle-class families in the 1950s believed that they were the last stand of the traditional American family. But May contends that historians and sociologists consider the 50s nuclear family particularly peculiar, because the 1950s generation “with its strong domestic ideology, pervasive consensus politics, and peculiar demographic behavior” was very different from the 1940s and 1960s generations (9). The “them” and “us” mentality of McCarthyism gave new momentum to the perception of someone or something different as a threatening entity. The space for opposition became increasingly narrower; since the contained nuclear family was the basis of a strong nation, being “different,” as in not congruent to the domestic ideology, became a threat of great proportions. McCarthyism dealt with what could not be incorporated in the culture of domesticity as a potential threat, rather than an indication of problematic aspects of the consensus. Indicative of the era’s policies was the formation of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which “conducted investigations through the 1940s and '50s into alleged communist activities” (*Encycloapedia Britannica*).

Eleanor Vance as Hill House’s Victim

Eleanor Vance, a sheltered single woman in the ‘50s, wishes to escape her family which treats her as a burden and a servant at the same time. In her early thirties, she is a social

pariah in an era when "70 percent of all women were married by the age of twenty-four" (Breines 50). In Hill House, her attempts to connect with Luke, the heir of Hugh Crain's property, and Theodora, an independent bohemian artist, fail. Unresolved tensions, familial guilt and the real possibility of living a lonely, dependent life return to haunt her. Unable to voice her fears and objections, she lets her anger take over in a series of poltergeist manifestations.

Only a few pages are dedicated to the quarrel between Eleanor, her sister, and her brother-in-law, but they are enough to give an insightful image of a middle-class postwar family. The dispute over the car, which belongs to both sisters, apart from serving as a connecting thread to the Crain sisters' feud, shows the importance of material goods to the postwar family. The status of owning a car was not only financial, but also familial. Karal Ann Marling explains that during the '50s "the standard American car was a family car" (156).

Carrie's insistence that they need the car in case their daughter get sick indicates the view that they are more worthy because they are a married couple with a child (*HH* 11). Her mention that she is "doing what Mother would have thought best" (12) shows that obligation towards their mother has been used repeatedly to constrain Eleanor from asserting her personal needs. While their mother was still alive, Eleanor was made, through this guilt-trip, to keep taking care of her. This clue explains her strong feelings of guilt about her mother's death and the difficulty to express her anger openly. It comes as no surprise that Eleanor was raised in strict patterns. Breines explains that the conditions that shaped the parents' generation had an effect on the way they raised their children: "On reflection it is not surprising, given the historical experiences of their mothers, that many middle-class white girls were raised in families that were traditional, even strict…The mothers…with vivid

experiences of the Depression and war, worried about scarcity and security" (61). Nevertheless, Carrie's moral arguments -"I'd never forgive myself, Eleanor, if I lent you the car and something happened"- cannot hide the material concerns, characteristic of the era of affluence: "how do we know she'd bring [the car] back in good condition?" (*HH* 12).

Guilt is also imposed through moral control. Carrie claims that Dr. Montague is doing experiments on young women and suggests that they involve sex. This is why she and her husband wanted "to make sure that this doctor fellow was not aiming to introduce Eleanor to savage rites not unconnected with matters Eleanor's sister deemed it improper for an unmarried young woman to know" (8). Later on, Carrie says that "(…) Eleanor is prepared to run off to the ends of the earth at the invitation of any man" which calls Eleanor's moral integrity into question (12). In that way, Eleanor is caught between the stereotypes of "the good, pure woman on the pedestal and the whore of the desires of the flesh" (Friedan 31). Female sexuality outside of marriage did not correspond to the type of womanhood dictated by the domestic ideology. Eleanor as "the good, pure woman" is infantilized through Carrie's condescending tone; she is also demonized as "the whore" by the blatant disapproval of her sexual potential. Evidently, she has to stay an "old maid" to serve the married couple. An "old maid" did not have to be particularly old: "An old maid was a person who had failed so seriously in her understanding or execution of a woman's role that she hadn't even established the marriage prerequisite to having a home. Old maids were not figures of horror so much, nor of abhorrence, as they were objects of somewhat condescending pity" (qtd. in Breines 55).[2] Not having her own place, Eleanor could neither get married nor assume independence.

[2] Breines is quoting from John Modell and John Campbell "Family Ideology and Family Values in the 'Baby Boom': A Secondary Analysis of the 1955 Growth of American Families Survey of Single Women."

Eleanor manages to escape with the car without waiting for her in-laws' permission. This misleads the reader into believing that the novel is typical of the "individual against the system" literary theme which emerged in the era as a counter-narrative to conformist media (Chafe 134), for example J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). However Eleanor's perceived rebellion is rather an act of desperation.

While following Dr. Montague's directions, she is always careful not to diverge from the original route. Dale Bailey suggests that her daydreaming reflects "the degree to which she has absorbed the ideology of her society" (36). Even in her fantasy she is solitary and attached to an ideal of proper femininity. In her daydreams, the people of the town would revere her as a respectable old woman because she would dust the stone lions every morning (*HH* 18), or a prince would arrive to save her from loneliness (20).

As soon as she reaches the diner in Hillsdale she is thrust back to reality. Despite her efforts to make small-talk she is clearly unwanted, because she interrupts the "elaborate joke" between the girl who works at the diner and the man who "comes in every day" (24). This scene shows in literary economy how deeply misplaced Eleanor is. She is a nuisance to these people flirting and completely excluded from heterosexual courtship. Similar instances are repeated in Hill House, when she encounters the flirtatious attitude between Theodora and Luke. These situations are the norm in her life and explain the development of her final breakdown.

When she reaches Hill House, she discovers that, despite its dreadful aura, it is still desired by her and "as hard to get into as heaven" (29). Hill House, secluded and private from the rest of the world, stands for the domestic and patriarchal ideology. It dominates its inhabitants and gives the impression that it can watch, spy and persecute them whenever they act in an unacceptable manner. At the same time, it is impossible to grasp its design because

of its absurd symmetry: it has been built on patriarchal familial values of the past. In fact, it was meant to resemble Hugh Crain's mind, who indoctrinated his daughters in terms of a vengeful morality and dogmatism. Therefore, the house personified in the Gothic tradition, is "not a fit place for people or for love or for hope" (35).

Hugh Crain's beliefs are summarized in his book *Memories, for Sophia Anne Lester Crain; A Legacy for Her Education and Enlightenment During Her Lifetime From Her Affectionate and Devoted Father* (168). He assumed complete control of his daughters' education in order to shape them in accordance with the contemporary Cult of True Womanhood.[3] His morals and absolute paternal authority becomes the target of Luke and Theodora's ridicule, because they seem completely obsolete under their scrutiny. However, the Cold War era's domestic ideology is a revisiting of restrictive sentiments, to which they can only position themselves in accordance or opposition.

Dr. Montague chooses the participants in his investigation team for their unique abilities, but also like a movie cast. It is notable that he chose to cross out "publicity seekers" and those "unsuitable because of a clear tendency to take the center of the stage" (5) like aspiring starlets in a Hollywood movie. Eleanor is initially worried that she cannot participate in their playful introduction. *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman's sociological study published in 1950, proposed that Americans that would have consisted of Eleanor's generation were raised and educated to "fit in." Americans, according to Riesman, were "other-directed" in the sense that they would be attentive to the opinion of their peer group and conform to it (70), rather than form their own opinions and identity. Eleanor's constant

[3] The Cult of True Womanhood was at its prime between 1820 and 1860. Hugh Crain's book was written in 1881, when his ideas about True Womanhood could still hold power. Barbara Welter explains that "[t]he attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues- piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife- woman" (152).

anxiety reflects her inability to perform adequately in order to "fit in." She does not realize that everyone is keeping up appearances because of her lack of life experience.

More importantly, they all view themselves in relation to domestic ideology. However, from this perspective they are all proven inadequate. Dr. Montague is constantly ridiculed by his wife and compared to Arthur, a caricature of the masculine ideal of the era. Nevertheless, he decides to put up with Mrs. Montague, who embodies a parody of the stereotype of the domineering mother[4] and the perfect housewife, because, in his view, she is a "good wife" (198) who would never burden him with household responsibilities. He thus adheres to domestic ideology.

Luke is condemned by his aunt and Mrs. Montague for what is perceived as a lack of masculine behavior. His gestures under their scrutiny are all shameful, from picking his fork in what is perceived as an effeminate manner (65) to his reluctance to seek for Theodora and Eleanor in the dark (182). Breines explains that "[m]any observers believed that American mothers did not curb their sons' oedipal drives, thereby creating dependent and immature sons" (42). Fears about the demise of masculinity are expressed when Luke's behavior is contrasted to Arthur's caricature machismo. In that way, the demands posed by the domestic ideology are ridiculed and revealed as impossible. Luke is willing to inherit Hill House and what it stands for, but is determined not to inhabit it. Therefore, he will continue to adhere to a fake respect towards Cold War policies.

Theodora and Eleanor are presented as doubles, a common Gothic trope. But Theodora is a fully fledged character and not just a double set up in contrast with Eleanor's characteristics. Her undeniable charm and gift in intuition led Dr. Montague to choose her for

[4] According to Breines, "the mother appears in social science and popular literature as a more powerful figure than she was, and than the sociologists knew she was, given their documentation of the growth of secondary institutions" (45).

the investigation team. Her intuition allows her to connect with Eleanor and offer sympathy and companionship. Also, her attitude towards norms is clearly defiant. This is demonstrated when she recalls her boarding-school days and she readily admits that despite the punishment she suffered for shattering a greenhouse with a brick, she went on and did it again (73). In contrast, Eleanor's anger is never communicated clearly, since she denies any involvement in the stone-throwing incident in her childhood. In fact, Theodora and Eleanor exemplify the conflicting images of the era about femininity. Theodora has disaffiliated herself from her family, does not use her last name anymore and signs her artworks with "Theo," a gender ambiguous version of her first name. She laughs at Eleanor's question whether she is married and lives with her companion. Critic Tricia Lootens (165) and writer Stephen King (300) have read Theodora's vague remarks about her companion as an indication that she lives with a woman. Eleanor is touched because nobody has taken interest in her before. However, Theodora is scared when she realizes how painfully lonely Eleanor is. After all, her staying in Hill House is a break from her every-day routine, because she had a quarrel with her partner and fled from their apartment. Therefore, she does not want to genuinely connect with Eleanor; when she understands how much Eleanor needs connection, she readily withdraws.

Eleanor is not in touch with her desires. Reality is harsh for her when she realizes that Luke, whom she initially views as a potential husband, the lover waiting for her at the end of her journey as in the line "Journeys end in lovers meeting" she repeats, is not the courageous prince she expected him to be: "the only man I have ever sat and talked to alone, and I am impatient; he is simply not very interesting" (167). She certainly does not want to be a mother-figure for Luke; at the same time, she is still disappointed that the prince of her dreams does not exist.

Similarly, Eleanor cannot reflect on her connection with Theodora. Her lack of insight and experience leads her to believe that she has found a person she can connect with and possibly live with. Her jealousy prevails when she realizes that she has been deluded. A poltergeist manifestation ensues, and Theodora finds her clothes soaked in a red substance and the inscription "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" is written on the wall of her room (155).

Eleanor is initially attracted to the kind of life she could have with either Luke or Theodora. They are in a sense the first people she connects with outside of a loveless home and stand for different paths in a life she could take. She could be either married to Luke or perhaps a new companion to Theodora, neither of whom is willing to come up to her expectations, however. More than anything else, she has to find her own way, but she realizes that she would have no support from her new "family."

After Theodora finds her clothes covered in a red substance that could be blood, a discussion about fear ensues. All statements ring true to Eleanor's identity crisis, but Dr. Montague, Luke and Theodora also talk about themselves and the things they fear: "'I think we are only afraid of ourselves,' the doctor said slowly. 'No,' Luke said. 'Of seeing ourselves clearly and without disguise.' 'Of knowing what we really want,' Theodora said" (159-160).

The discussion is connected to Cold War collective paranoia: they have to maintain appearances in order to avoid persecution with minimum accusations of being not normal. The red color smearing Theodora's clothes brings forth a connection to Red Scare fears of contamination. Metaphors of contagion to the pristine domestic sphere are paradigmatic to McCarthyism. Eleanor is contagious in this way because she threatens everyone's private sphere. As she slowly disintegrates, she considers surrendering to the House:

> Look. There's only one of me, and it's all I've got. I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I'm living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me helpless and frantic and driven and I can't stop it, but I know I'm not really going to be hurt and yet time is so long and even a second goes on and on and I could stand any of it if I could only surrender— (160)

The "family" that has come together with a common purpose needs to expel the weakest person that threatens its unity. The image of family as a space of nurture and unconditional acceptance collapses completely in the key scene[5] of the novel, in which Eleanor screams, "Whose hand was I holding?" (163). In fact, it is her own hand; she has been left completely on her own. Even her presence embodies failure and nobody wants to break their façade of normality and connect with her. She is readily expelled as the failure of this system.

The boundaries investigated within Hill House are supposed to be between the natural and the supernatural. However, they turn out to be the limits of social restrictions. Jackson's "use of ghosts and witchcraft…is not mystification but historicization" (Hattenhauer 4). Eleanor cannot withhold her rage anymore and turns it against herself. After she is rescued from the tower by Luke whilst trying to find union with the house through suicide, she attempts a, fatal this time, union once more. She tried to be a mother for Luke, a temporary companion and flirt for Theodora and a promising participant for Dr. Montague's experiment. When she stops playing the role she was assigned, she is of no use anymore. Her place in the house is taken by Theodora wearing her clothes and calling herself Eleanor (222), so she needs to leave.

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[5] Lootens mentions that Jackson herself in her first draft of *Hill House* set apart this scene as containing the "key" to the novel (159).

Her suicide is a desperate attempt to attract their attention. Even though she thinks that "[t]hey can't turn me out or shut me out or laugh at me or hide from me; I won't go, and Hill House belongs to *me*" (245) she needs their approval: "Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?" (246).

The end is going to be tragic for the narrative's misfit since "the Gothic tends to reinforce, if only in a novel's final pages, culturally prescribed doctrines of morality and propriety" (Lloyd-Smith 5). The impact of the realization that she has to conform everywhere, that normality is not that normal, leads her whole belief system to collapse. She does not have a support system, or the retrospection of the emerging counterculture's motto "the personal is political" to relate to other people's experiences, and through this connection develop her self-awareness. Jackson explores an alternative to Eleanor's fate in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, where Merricat willingly "opts out" of her New England community.

Chapter 2 Anticipating the Counterculture in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

We Have Always Lived in the Castle was published in 1962, in the beginning of a new era characterized by a wave of optimism. John F. Kennedy's election in 1961, the youngest president to be elected in the history of the United States contributed to the iconic image of the 1960s as a strikingly different era, which would give meaning and purpose to American affluence. Evoking the American Dream in his Inaugural Address in 1961, with the famous imperative "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," President Kennedy signaled a new era of American interventionism and called the disaffected youth to participate in the national imperative (Hill 19). His adherence to the Cold War called for self-discipline, delayed gratification and restraint. After Soviet Russia launched Sputnik 1 in 1957, the Space Race was commenced with JFK's assertion that the US will manage to land the first man on the moon. The initial optimism was minimized after the failure of the military operation in the Bay of Pigs, known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, in 1962, and the continuation of the Vietnam War (Jameson, Stephanson & West).

In 1962 the division of Berlin and the construction of the Berlin Wall had a tremendous effect not only in Germany but also in continental and global politics. US politics in Europe proposed a strong anticommunist stance, represented by the Marshall plan and JFK's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in 1963 (Hill 24). The national ego was fed with the assumed role of the gatekeeper of liberal democracy in Europe. An emergency condition was created urging not only countries but also individuals to pick sides.

The Opposition to Technocracy

The rise of the counterculture during the 1960s was nourished in the 1950s, despite the dominant dichotomous nature of politics. Daniel Marcus explains that:

> The 1950s are depicted as an era of American global dominance, personal security, and economic prosperity, but also as a time of stultifying social convention, racism, and widespread denial of national problems. The 1960s, conversely, are seen by their critics as a time marked by social unrest and chaos, the trauma of the Vietnam War, and the failure of Great Society programs, and by their defenders as a time of energetic idealism, personal liberation, and vibrant popular culture. The decades' continued iconic power is strengthened by their concurrence with the childhood and youth of the Baby Boom generation, and with the twin emergences and ascendancies of television and rock and roll. (2)

It is true then that the 1950s' dominant culture was challenged although on a smaller scale than in the 1960s, by social movements and social critique. The '50s zeitgeist includes among others the Beat Generation and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Research on middle-class life and white collar culture like William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1954) offered an insightful critique on contemporary business culture (Whyte 4). Some of the main works that influenced the 1960s counterculture and student movement were written in the '50s, like Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), an evaluation of 1950s youth problems (Roszak 178), and Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955) (Roszak 84).

Conformity was antithetical to the rising youth movements. These were expressed through the New Left, the Civil Rights Movement, and the various expressions of the counterculture, which were diverse and sometimes antithetical. The 1960s counterculture and some of its most influential figures were examined in Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a*

Counter Culture (1969). His goal was to show that the various, often seemingly apolitical movements, like the hippie movement, shared a common oppositional stance to the technocracy. He wanted to translate this "culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbarian intrusion" and connect it to the course of American history (42). In undertaking the task to present the counterculture as a movement that expressed a clear opposition to the values of the previous generation he showcased the value conflict that marked the 1960s:

> It strikes me as obvious beyond dispute that the interests of our college-age and adolescent young in the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs, and communitarian experiments comprise a cultural constellation that radically diverges from values and assumptions that have been in the mainstream of our society at least since the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century. ("Preface" xi-xii)

Roszak commented on the claim that the baby-boomers had extreme self-confidence because they were raised to have their every whim satisfied (30). He clearly stated that the baby-boomers were not spoilt, but rather "they are influenced to believe that being human has something to do with pleasure and freedom" (31).

Theorists like Marcuse explained that the refusal to conform to the previous generation's values was not a whim or a narcissistic imperative, but an attempt to find a way out of what has been defined as the technocracy. Technocracy envisions a system of organization which is based on total integration. In this worldview the prevalence of technology would lead to optimal production. But according to Jacques Ellul:

> Technique requires predictability and, no less, exactness of prediction. It is necessary, then, that technique prevail over the human being…Human caprice crumbles before

> this necessity; there can be no human autonomy in the face of technical autonomy. The individual must be fashioned by techniques, either negatively (by the techniques of understanding man) or positively (by the adaptation of man to the technical framework), in order to wipe out the blots his personal determination introduces into the perfect design of the organization. *The Technological Society* (qtd. in Roszak 6)

A technocratic worldview appropriates "to itself the whole meaning of Reason, Reality, Progress, and Knowledge," all words with a positive meaning, to the point that it "will render it impossible for men to give any name to their bothersomely unfulfilled potentialities but that of madness" (Roszak xiii). In that sense whatever cannot be explained in technical terms and used in an efficiently productive way, such as imagination and instinct, is equated with the opposite of reason, madness.

Marcuse in his neo-Marxist thinking saw potential in the student movement instead of the working class, which had according to him become integrated in the Great Society. His hope for the Great Refusal was transferred to the "outcasts," who would form a new class that would readily resist the processes of assimilation:

> (…) [U]nderneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is in the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. (*One-Dimensional Man* 256)

Braunstein and Doyle explain that the 1960s counterculture's imperative was the change of norms through personal transformation in the first place (15). This personal transformation was connected to the creation of a new perception that would stand against the

norms of the dominant culture. Braunstein and Doyle attempt to divide the 1960s counterculture into two phases, even though they clarify that dates can only be estimated roughly. The first phase according to their division spans from 1964 to 1968 and the second from 1968 until the beginning of the 1970s. They state that the first phase "was the white youth-dominated, highly optimistic, even utopian counterculture of the 'Flower Children' period" (11). The hippies are not synonymous with the whole of the counterculture, but rather an expression of it that generated the greatest media hype, mainly because of the hippies' emphasis on a different appearance and connection to LSD culture. However, the hippie movement was more than its stereotypical depiction: its "love ethic" was rather a "patchwork construction" as Braunstein explains because:

> [it] drew from the Civil Rights nonviolence, the radical pessimism and alienation of the Beats, apostolic early Christianity, peace movement/Ban the Bomb pacifism, and the redemptive millenarianism of the LSD subculture and combined these stances to radicalize rejuvenation culture with a more critical social perspective. To be childlike, in this new construction, meant to be at one with nature, with the earth, with other human beings; to be nonviolent, loving, and (re)sensitized to the violence around you; to consciously regain the simplicity and wonder of childhood as a perceptual prism for reclaiming a society wracked by civil uprisings and war abroad. (252)

David Farber explores the connection between LSD use and the 1960s countercultures. Farber notes that "[w]hile no single factor figured the emergence of claims of an altered consciousness in the 1960s, LSD played a fundamental role" (20). Dr. Timothy Leary promoted LSD "with an advertising slogan: 'Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out,' by which he meant, 'Activate your neural and genetic equipment…interact harmoniously with the world around you…[pursue] an active, selective and graceful process of detachment from

involuntary or unconscious commitments'"(qtd. [6]in Farber 32). However, the effect of the detachment he proclaimed was to an extent the abandonment of vital commitments by "dropping out" of society.

Adolescents and Popular Cultural Production

The "defiant generation" grew up influenced by the mainstream cultural production directed to adolescents. The 1950s preoccupation with juvenile delinquency gave rise to films with fatally rebellious protagonists, like Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (1953), playing the role of a bike gang leader, and James Dean, in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), playing the role of Jim Stark. Brando with his "Whadda you got?" in the face of what he was rebelling against is read by Chafe as "a cry for the individual to reject the self-deception of consumer culture and find another way" (142).

With the beginning of the 1960s "adult concerns with…adolescent gang-induced juvenile delinquency of the fifties morphed somewhat into concern with…*suburban*, *middle-class* delinquency" (Brooks 121). [7] The cultural stereotype of the teenager became synonymous with revolt and unreasonable demands. By the 1960s teenagers had their very own magazines, films and television series with young protagonists. There was a rise of specialization in teen sociology and psychology, expressing fears of the narcissistic, tyrannical teenager. There were actual reasons for this growing interest, even fear, towards

[6] Farber quotes from Robert Snyder, ed., *Buckminster Fuller: Autobiographical Monologue/Scenario* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. 54-55.)

[7] The impact of these concerns is echoed in later films, like John Water's *Cry-Baby* (1990), which is a musical pastiche of youth gang films with an end of reconciliation between the juvenile delinquents and the "nice kids" (*Cry-Baby* IMDb).

teenagers. More children meant less space for each person in the family house (23)[8]. The biggest source of anxiety, though, was the gradual realization that the Baby Boom generation was moving towards a different direction:

> The children of the 1950s, meanwhile - the Baby Boom generation - have held a special place in the nation's idea of its future, as Lawrence Grossberg has maintained. The generation that could redeem the sacrifices of World War II would be seen eventually as rejecting the Fifties vision of normal life in favor of political rebellion and social experimentation in the 1960s, challenging the nation's orientation toward a rewarding future. (Marcus 2)

The rise of science-fiction films with a post-apocalyptic and escapist atmosphere fed the adolescents' imagination (usually through space travel or a generalized destruction). For a generation which was brought up "debating the pros and cons of surviving a nuclear war that killed most other people" in school, absurd settings and entities were both threatening and fascinating (Brooks 11). Dystopian and utopian fantasies were representative of the escapist needs of the era and prepared for the condemnation of the current world as dystopia and the ultimate goal as the search for a utopia.

In her 1965 essay "The Imagination of Disaster," Susan Sontag argued that the rise of science fiction films in the 1950s and early 1960s offered the individual through "the lure of [a] generalized disaster" the opportunity to be released "from normal obligations"(45). One of her examples is the 1959 film *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* which is "devoted to the fantasy of occupying the deserted city and starting all over again - Robinson Crusoe on a world-wide scale" (45). The '50s science fiction film, which is connected to the later massive,

[8] Brooks mentions a popular research of the time by Yale University scholar Louise Bates-Ames and Grace and Fred Hechinger, *Teenage Tyranny* which explains how the new teenagers grow up faster and have increasing material demands (103).

often millennial, disaster blockbuster, also creates a generalized sense of emergency, a need for more control in public life and a domineering imperative to live for the present by over-consuming and maintaining an apathetic stance.

The horror boom was prevalent in films, comics, and television series like *The Twilight Zone*. Tom Engelhardt shows that *The Twilight Zone* was dominated by "repeated visions of nuclear terror" and instances of "identity and boundary confusion" (153). He notes that the show had its strongest appeal to "the young, to the underside, where they could thrill to the dismantling fear and confusion that lay in some secret world or at the end of time" (153).

The "teenage outsider" was either presented as a monster in the teenage monster film genre or the hero who saves the day, as in *The Blob* (1958). In teen monster film series like *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) and *How to Make a Monster* (1958) the teenage boys were discontent and restless but they turned into actual monsters because they were tricked and used by adults. The dynamics are oversimplified in making a specific adult, usually a doctor or scientist being the villain in the plot, but still carry an undertone of intergenerational conflict. Youth aggressiveness is depicted as a primal but positive force if not manipulated, equating youth with the double potential for truthfulness and destruction.

While horror comics were banned by the Comic Magazine Association of America (Carabas 7), a revival was on the way in the early 1960s, with a more flexible interpretation of the law and the creation of the alternative "comix." Fortunately, *MAD* magazine survived

censorship and "put a name to the youth's discontent", as in angry and crazy (Hill).[9] Teodora Carabas explains that:

> The magazine targeted everything: it satirized the whole of the political spectrum, rendered absurd familiar aspects of daily life, and poked fun at television shows and texts in other media, comics included… The cover of the magazine's first issue clearly stated, the strips were ''tales calculated to drive you MAD.'' In other words, most MAD comics were hard to pin down because they were tales intentionally created to undermine authority while keeping a seemingly innocuous facade. (9)

Merricat Blackwood as a Society Dropout

Mary Katherine "Merricat" Blackwood is the eighteen-year-old narrator of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Like most of Jackson's protagonists Merricat sounds much younger in her fanciful daydreams. Time stopped for herself, her older sister Constance and Uncle Julian six years ago, the day when the rest of the family died from poisoning with arsenic in the sugar. As will be revealed later, Merricat was responsible for the murders; the reader is less shocked with the crime than ready to sympathize with the young protagonist. In the course of the novel, the Blackwood family is gradually uncovered as a traumatizing environment for its weakest members; therefore feeling empathy for Merricat becomes easier. Her absolute refusal to "fit in," unlike Jackson's previous heroines like Natalie Waite in *Hangsaman* (1951), Elizabeth in *The Bird's Nest* (1954) or Eleanor Vance in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), signifies a change in the author's attitude towards the relation between the individual

[9] More specifically, "What Would Happen If Teens Ran the Country" and "Tomorrow's Parents" columns feature alternate or future societies in which the surge of teens in the sixties wreak havoc with parent-adolescent relationships (Brooks 119).

woman and society. It also denotes a change of times, with the new generation demanding space for self-expression out of the suffocating culture of containment. Merricat's story uses contemporary fears about teenagers and their increasing influence as a new demographic group. The primacy of her need for self-determination, autonomy and creative manipulation of everyday life connects her with the emerging counterculture of the 1960s. Jackson, through Merricat, foreshadows the groundbreaking changes that the emerging counterculture would bring forth, and a factor that contributed to its end. Because Merricat refuses to be part of a limiting world, she sets up barricades to protect herself and Constance against Cousin Charles and the villagers. In the end, the world remains as is and they happily haunt their own house.

Merricat's need for constant attention is fulfilled by her older sister Constance's maternal disposition. Her role as the middle child in the family makes her redundant. Uncle Julian forgets about her existence: "My niece Mary Katherine died in an orphanage, of neglect, during her sister's trial for murder. But she is of very little consequence to my book, and so we will have done with her" (93). Thomas as the only son would have been the rightful heir and Constance has accepted long ago the position of the housewife. The only way for Merricat to contribute to the Blackwoods' public image of perfection would have been to adjust herself to an acceptable feminine behavior. But girlhood again as usually in Jackson's oeuvre, for example in her short story "The Missing Girl" (*Just an Ordinary Day*, 1996), is a state of invisibility.

Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) is preoccupied with, as the subtitle explains, the "Problems of Youth in the Organized Society" where the young delinquent is implicitly and explicitly gendered masculine. In the monster teen film genre the werewolf is always a boy, while girls are usually the protagonist's romantic interest. Merricat's

aggressiveness, aversion to cleanliness, and constant energetic attitude are not considered as ideal social traits in the first place, because they are counter-productive and signs of the social misfit. They are also deemed masculine in an era where the policing of gender norms was very pressing. When she says that "I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf…but I have had to be content with what I had" (1), she is actually expressing discontent.

As a girl, Merricat assumes the role of a witch. Her witchcraft is antithetical to *Bewitched*, a popular television series in the mid-1960s which dealt with a witch mother and housewife, two perfectly acceptable roles for a woman of the era. But Merricat has a lively imagination, a hedonistic attitude to food and a symbolic understanding of money, when she buries the box of silver dollars as a game (40). Her daily rituals correspond to the defiant youth's imperative. Manfred Pütz in his study on 1960s American fiction expresses that "what was needed was the domination of the instincts, of spontaneity, and of the unconscious: the living out of the impulses of a freed sexuality, the release of purging, destructive energies, and the celebration of an anarchic creativity which did not mind what it created as long as it could go on creating" (41). Just as the counterculture of the sixties would speak in "a foreign tongue" (Roszak 54), Merricat chants her self-made mantras "Melody Gloucester Pegasus" (51) and "talks" with her cat Jonas. Her magical thinking (5) connects her with the New Age fascination with the occult. The absurdity of Merricat's daily rituals is functional in her contained universe. Constance's extensive knowledge about growing edible and poisonous plants (35) associates her with the hippies' reconnection with nature. Both sisters carry their "dust cloths and the broom and dustpan and mop like a pair of witches walking home" (69).

The dark humorous performance during Helen Clark's and Mrs. Wright's visit, when Merricat persistently asks if they want sugar (28), is the only kind of pretense she would accept. In reenacting "the most sensational poisoning case of the century" (32) Merricat gives her audience what it came looking for: a family of lunatics, as in "The Bright Side of" column of *MAD* magazine.[10] In this column, an innocent depiction of middle-class family life covered a sardonic criticism of its very components. With her innocent questions she exposes the hypocrisy of their visitors, since they come to see them as a form of charity, not as an act of free will and neighborly interest.

Whenever separation from her sister is insinuated, or the presence of her father is invoked, Merricat freezes. Various fragments of memory, as recalled by Uncle Julian, reveal a man obsessed with his money with which he controlled his family; John Blackwood "took pride in his table, his family, his position in the world" (33). Merricat had repeatedly disobeyed her father, leading to her punishment (34). Their mother accepts only visitors of the same class in the house, accumulates property and claims control over the domestic servant. Her obsession with keeping the drawing room clean was passed to her daughters, who even after her death continue to take care of it. The absurdity of upper middle class family rituals is made prominent through these details.

Merricat's discontent is not isolated to her domestic environment but it is also made evident when she expresses her hatred for the villagers: "'It's wrong to hate them,' Constance said, 'it only weakens you,' but I hated them anyway, and wondered why it had been worth while creating them in the first place" (9). With her wild imagination, she dismisses their close-mindedness and dull, identical houses. However, she cannot grasp the threat the

[10] The cover of the 2006 Penguin edition of *Castle* makes the connection with the black humor quality of the novel and its popularity with young readers.

Blackwoods have posed with their financial power and exclusionary attitude to the rest of the area; her focus remains on her black and white view of the world, where Constance is the only source of goodness. She is unable to see outside of her own little world, something that contributes to her final seclusion.

When Cousin Charles arrives, he unapologetically starts controlling the sisters' lives. He assumes the role of an expert and creates a sense of urgency and obligation. This is unacceptable to Merricat who does not understand any sense of duty (79), in contrast to Constance who starts feeling guilty after Charles' intrusion. The value conflict is made evident, with Merricat as the youngest readily expressing it. The urgency Charles creates, when historicized, reflects the backdrop of the novel: the imperative that American citizens should "ask what [they] can do for [their] country" and the continuation of the Vietnam War generated a new sense of duty, along with protest. Assuming the role of the technocrat, he measures the Blackwoods according to their productive abilities: the counterproductive Uncle Julian, a senile old man, has to be put in a nursing home. Merricat has to grow up and discipline herself. Constance, the only one who has hopes of re-entering society, has to fulfill her feminine purpose through marriage. Charles has an opinion on everything, and even claims expertise when trying to fix the broken step, a task he is proven to be incompetent at (86). He measures the silver coins and the watch (86), which for Merricat have great symbolic significance, according to their exchange value and has no appreciation for beauty or creativity. Similarly, he wishes for a union with Constance not only for her dowry but also for her abilities.

After Merricat sets the house on fire to remove Charles, the villagers find an excuse to openly turn against the remaining Blackwoods. They throw stones and loot the house in an expression of utter hate against the perceived enemies of the community. Murphy has

detected recognizable elements that situate Jackson's novels in New England (104-126). In that frame, the sisters' depiction as witches connects to the Salem trials. While the majority of the people on trial and burned as witches were women, the reasons that led to the Salem incidents were not just gender specific. The "underlying themes" that signified the Salem witch trials were congruent to "the witch's temper or eccentric behavior, actions that the community disapproves," inheritance issues and interestingly, intergenerational conflict. The cases were mostly between neighbors (Demos 1317). "Witch hunts," though, in *Castle*'s historical context, were practices connected to the Cold War.

Disaster seems to give an opportunity for a new start. Merricat's wish to live on the moon with the only person who has fully accepted her is fulfilled. In 1962 when the novel was published the "space race" between Soviet Russia and the United States was finally successful, with John Glenn becoming the first American to be put in orbit around Earth. The search for a utopia, a new land of wonders that would reconnect the present with the Puritan mission to the City upon the Hill and the nation's origins, covered deep seated anxiety of a nuclear war that would leave Earth a wasteland. The vastness of the galaxy was ironically a mirror reflecting the need for seclusion and containment.

In the moon's feminine space, Merricat and Constance realize that they do not need more to be content, since they were not using the destroyed rooms in the first place. Like two drop-outs, Constance wears Uncle Julian's old clothes and Merricat can walk around happily in her hippie-like attire, made out of a tablecloth (136). The sisters realize that they can be content and self-sufficient with what their garden produces and a few home supplies.

According to Lynette Carpenter the sisters' final seclusion is a triumph of female "self-sufficiency" (203). However, their "opting-out" is rather an act of desperation and inability to connect with the rest of the world. They remain in the confines of their "castle"

and finally turn into "ghosts". They rather become part of local folklore and are remembered as benevolent spirits that can cause harm to unsuspecting children.

Even in this place of happiness Merricat and Constance have to constantly check their locks and barricades. Historical hindsight shows that the hippies' opting out of society resulted mostly in the dissolution of such groups or their re-incorporation to the main body of society.[11] In the aftermath of the countercultural revolution hippies were evaluated as apolitical by their critics, because they did not work systematically towards viable change. In the same way, Merricat and Constance live secluded on their own "moon", similar to a hippie commune. The countercultural efforts to create a new consciousness, to open up in new ways of experiencing the world away from the norms transferred from the dominant culture, waned gradually. The end of the novel rather expects the aftermath of Timothy Leary's "Turn on. Tune in. Drop out." Instead of working towards the change of consciousness on a collective scale, they rather follow a misinterpreted version of Leary's statement. Consequently, they move out of the world in order to protect themselves; they are in turn dismissed and become of part of local folklore by the rest of society, similar to the hippie stereotype that dominated the popular culture and still resonates today.

[11] Timothy Miller stresses, however, in his essay "The Sixties-Era Communes", that communes were "enormously, endlessly diverse" (328). Therefore, they did not all have the same fate.

Chapter 3 One-Dimensional Suburbs in *Expensive People*

One of the questions often addressed to Oates concerns the violence in her writing. It is such a persistent question, that she decided to reply with the essay "Why Is Your Writing So Violent?" (*New York Times* 1981). In this essay she argues that because of her refusal to write about "domestic" and "subjective" material, she is posed with this "sexist question." She concludes that "the serious writer, after all, bears witness. The serious writer restructures 'reality' in the service of his or her art (…) but reality is always the foundation, just as the alphabet...." Since reality is violent, she wants to deal with "the phenomenon of violence and its aftermath."

Many critics and journalists who seek out the source of the darkness of her stories, which involve topics like suicide, mass murder, incest and rape, think that they can find it in the individual psyche of Oates. This is a notion which the writer herself rejects. In fact, her style has been characterized as psychological realism (Johnson).[12] Oates combines observed reality with a profound interest in personal psychology. She traces the continuum between private and public violence. Her use of psychological realism is deeply political; through the characters' individual situation she manages to present insightful social commentary. Walter Clemons, in *Newsweek*, comments that "Oates has an absolute identification with her material: the spirit of a society at a crucial point in its history" (qtd. in biographical note in *Expensive People* viii), the zeitgeist.

Oates published the Wonderland Quartet during the late 1960s and early 1970s. She explains that all four novels, *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Expensive People* (1968), *them* (1969) and *Wonderland* (1971) "were conceived by the author as critiques of America –

[12] http://www.usfca.edu/jco/briefbiography/

American culture, American values, American dreams – as well as narratives in which romantic ambitions are confronted by what must be called 'reality'" (Afterword to *Expensive People* 221). *Expensive People* recounts upper-middle-class life in postwar suburban Detroit. The description of Fernwood was based on Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (223). Oates explains that the novel "with its climactic episode of self-destructive violence, was perceived as an expression of the radical discontent, the despair, the bewilderment and outrage of a generation of young and idealistic Americans confronted by an America of their elders so steeped in political hypocrisy and cynicism as to seem virtually irremediable except by the most extreme means" (221). Several stories unfold within the Everett family: Richard's neglect, his mother's struggle between upward mobility and independence, and Oates's personal background in dialogue with Nada's, since they share Hungarian descent (Johnson 1). Oates "was galvanized to believe that the writing of a novel should be more than purely private, domestic, or even, contrary to the reigning Nabokovian imperatives of the day, apolitical and aesthetic" (Afterword to *A Garden of Earthly Delights* 402).

Oates addresses the problem of invisible violence, in order to understand visible violence, which is presented as causeless. In that way, the question "why is your writing so violent?" is not innocent, because it reproduces ignorance and denotes the extent to which her audience is conditioned universally to overlook systemic inequality and to look for the source of aggression in purely individual terms.

Herbert Marcuse's Critical Theory

The question about the source of the violence in Oates's writing is rendered obsolete when approached through Critical Theory, which is a:

> Marxist inspired movement in social and political philosophy originally associated with the work of the Frankfurt School. Drawing particularly on the thought of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, critical theorists maintain that a primary goal of philosophy is to understand and to help overcome the social structures through which people are dominated and oppressed. Believing that science, like other forms of knowledge, has been used as an instrument of oppression, they caution against a blind faith in scientific progress, arguing that scientific knowledge must not be pursued as an end in itself without reference to the goal of human emancipation. Since the 1970s, critical theory has been immensely influential in the study of history, law, literature, and the social sciences. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*)

The term was introduced by Max Horkheimer to describe the work of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, better known as the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School promoted interdisciplinary research, combining Marxist theory, psychoanalysis, sociology and philosophy. It relocated to the US after the rise of Nazism in Germany, in 1935 (Wheatland xv-xxi). One of the most prominent thinkers who emigrated to the US was philosopher and social theorist Herbert Marcuse, who proposed a reevaluation of Freudian psychoanalysis as a material discipline. Psychoanalysis had been neglected by orthodox Marxism as a purely bourgeois discipline. He contemplated on freedom and progress in postindustrial society, as he experienced it in the US, through the reexamination of Freud's theory of the instincts.

Eros and Civilization (1955), his treatise on Freud's theory of the instincts, was designed to influence the 1960s counterculture, especially the civil rights movement, the students' movement and the sexual revolution. Marcuse stressed that he employed psychological categories for his study "because they have become political categories" (xi), therefore contributing to the 1960s movements' motto "The personal is political."

In 1964 Marcuse published *One-Dimensional Man*, which explains how the "affluent society" is one dimensional. In the wake of this treatise Marcuse became increasingly less optimistic about human potential for freedom. In his lecture "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society" (1968) he contemplated the automation and the changing conditions of capitalism. *One-Dimensional Man* and "Aggressiveness" form a useful theoretical framework through which to explore *Expensive People* because of their critique of the affluent society and the analysis of the problem of violence.

In order to understand his critique, his main arguments have to be explained. According to Marcuse, Freudian theory "appears to be purely biological" but "is fundamentally social and historical" (*Five Lectures* "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts" 1). He addresses Freud's central argument in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: human instincts have to be suppressed in order for civilization to be created. This need is "inevitable and indissoluble," according to Freud (6). However, in Marcuse's view, his contemporary society has reached a very high level of technological advancement that could easily make possible the minimization of labor and repression. But, instead of the betterment of living conditions, the world has seen the terrors of two world wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb and the Cold War. It is indeed a fact that "the most effective subjugation and destruction of man by man takes place at the height of civilization, when the material and intellectual attainments of mankind seem to allow the creation of a truly free world" (*Eros* 4).

According to Freud, the Pleasure Principle, that is, the instincts' struggle "for pleasurable release of tension, for painless satisfaction of needs," has to subjugate itself to the Reality principle ("Freedom" 5). Only by the repression of the instincts is civilization possible. The social content of the Pleasure principle through the Reality principle transforms

the organism "from a subject-object of pleasure into a subject-object of work" (5). Unpleasant labor is alienated labor, which becomes the goal of life.

Marcuse draws upon Freud's notion of "domination" in his theory: "Domination is in effect whenever the individual's goals and purposes and the means of striving for and attaining them are prescribed to him and performed by him as something prescribed" ("Freedom" 1). This domination is exercised "by nature, by things" and by the self that has internalized the prevailing forms of authority (2). Since domination is internalized by the individual, it appears as autonomy. This autonomy does not equate with freedom, since freedom itself, under these terms, has become a form of domination. The historical aspect of "freedom" (called "unfreedom" to contrast real freedom) lies in the changing environment which forms the prevailing notions of authority. In that sense, "happiness" is also historically situated, and involves unfreedom. Happiness in the Cold War context equals success through progress and conformity, in order to be part of the "affluent society."

The performance principle is "the prevailing historical form of the reality principle" since instincts are socially and historically situated. Because the reality principle is formed and transferred in and by a "system of institutions" it transmits law and order according to the contemporary environment (*Eros* 15). Marcuse argues that the performance principle requires surplus repression, which is not enough to contain surplus aggression:

> While any form of the reality principle demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts, the specific historical institutions of the reality principle and the specific interests of domination introduce *additional* controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association. These additional controls arising from the specific institutions of domination are what we denote as *surplus repression* (*Eros* 37).

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse focuses specifically on American society. He explains how the performance principle has led to the liquidation of the two-dimensional society, thus shaping a society without opposition. By the reproduction of repressive needs, the flattening out of language that becomes completely functional and is reproduced by the media promotes a uniformity of thought.

In "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Societies" (1968) he gives a definition of the affluent society. It is characterized by industrial and technical capacity which is limited to the production of "unproductive" goods and services, "a rising standard of living," a "high degree of concentration of economic and political power" and "scientific and pseudoscientific investigation, control, and manipulation of private and group behavior, both at work and at leisure (including the behavior of the psyche, the soul, the unconscious, and the subconscious) for commercial and political purposes" (*Negations* 187). In the affluent society repression is no longer needed for the progress of civilization, but for the maintenance of the established society (189). Surplus repression is employed, which turns individuals against their basic needs.

Fernwood as the Affluent Society

In *Expensive People*, Fernwood is such an affluent society. Richard recounts his childhood until age eleven, when he started shooting with a rifle in his neighborhood, then finally shot and killed his own mother, Natashya "Nada" Romanov Everett. The backdrop of the tragic story of the Everett family is also the unfolding of upper-middle class suburbia during the 1950s and early 1960s, recounted at the end of the 1960s.

Fernwood, a "perfect" suburban community, is a paradise on earth for its inhabitants. Richard agrees by saying that "[i]f God remakes Paradise it will be in the image of Fernwood,

for Fernwood is Paradise constructed to answer all desires before they are even felt" (103). It fulfills all basic needs but also reproduces repressive needs. Similarly, Richard's parents, Elwood and Nada, appear to be a perfect couple to their local community. Elwood, a successful executive, is sought after by companies for his marketing skills. Nada, a promising minor writer and intellectual, has a life most women could only dream of. The dynamics between Richard's parents are not that well concealed, though. Elwood clearly has financial control over Nada, who completes his image as a "trophy wife" with her good looks and intellectual charm. Nada has numerous affairs and has run away from home in the past. She finds Fernwood unbearable, not even "material for a good novel" (69), but always returns to her comfortable life.

Having grown up in a working class immigrant family, Nada has found freedom from scarcity through her marriage to Elwood. However, she is trapped in a state of "unfreedom," forever tied to her material possessions. As Marcuse noted in *One-Dimensional Man*, "the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment" (9) . The affluent society has its own rules that do not appear repressive. But "[f]ree choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear - that is, if they sustain alienation" (*ODM* 8-9). The alienation between the members of the family is immense and dominates every aspect of their public life.

Fernwood appears a tolerant community which embraces intellectuals and supports a plurality of opinions. There is an abundance of information, the financial influence to invite famous writers and thinkers to give speeches, but thinking is no longer two-dimensional. There is a discussion group about "How to Relate to Beatnik Poetry" (79), but critical

thinking and countercultural voices are drained from their radical potential. Marcuse explains that the incorporation of oppositional trends to the dominant order is a tactic of the status quo:

> [T]here is a great deal of "Worship together this week," "Why not try God," Zen, existentialism, and beat ways of life, etc. But such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer contradictory to the status quo and no longer negative. They are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet. (*ODM* 14)

This condition is termed the "liquidation of two-dimensional culture." According to Marcuse, "[it] takes place not through the denial and rejection of the 'cultural values', but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale" (*ODM* 57). In that sense, "they serve as instruments of social cohesion" (57) in bringing together the middle class and by providing a common identity. In the same way, the names of streets and places allude to the classical tradition, like Richard's school, Johns Behemoth. Richard was aware at the concert Mr. Hofstadter took him to that "music was like eating, and both of them were like sleep: something to do that drew you into it, hadn't anything to do with you as a person" (108).

While driving to the concert, Mr. Hofstadter grows more aggressive because of the traffic. Aggressiveness is fed by "the conditions of crowding" and "noise" ("Aggressiveness" 195). Richard could see Mr. Hofstadter's "neck grow thicker and stronger as if preparing for battle" (110). He holds the wheel like a weapon and is only satisfied when he breaks the garage door at the end of their night (115). The "technological aggression and satisfaction" that is exhibited in this scene is explained as a transfer "from a subject to an object" according to Marcuse's thought:

> The phenomenon is quickly described: the act of aggression is physically carried out by a mechanism with a high degree of automatism, of far greater power than the individual human being who sets it in motion, keeps it in motion, and determines its end or target. The most extreme case is the rocket or missile; the most ordinary example the automobile. This means that the energy, the power activated and consummated is the mechanical, electrical, or nuclear energy of "things" rather than the instinctual energy of a human being. Aggression is, as it were, transferred from a subject to an object, or is at least "mediated" by an object, and the target is destroyed by a thing rather than by a Person. ("Aggressiveness" 198)

Elwood has a successful career because he has internalized one-dimensional thought. He works in an industry which produces an abundance of products similar to each other and which produces technology that is used for death. Elwood explains to Richard that his new company "has been working for years to perfect a certain device that…well, has immense value in determining the security of America" (120-121). All the companies he has worked for have abbreviated names. This fact makes their purpose indeterminable and is a characteristic of one-dimensional language. Marcuse notes that "the abbreviation may help to repress undesired questions" (*ODM* 94). Language becomes functional and making the association between abbreviation and meaning is not encouraged. The functionalized language is "radically anti-historical" (98) because it does not promote a connection between meaning and use, cause and effect. Similarly, Elwood does not make the connection between the products of the company he works for and war. The state of illness this system requires "does not make a distinction between social and financial stature." For example, "the tycoons of business and politics" have to embrace "the qualities of smart ruthlessness, moral indifference, and persistent aggressiveness," such as in Elwood's case ("Aggressiveness"

189). He gets drunk often and beats the chipmunks to death with a broom while he looks like the "mad maniac who had kidnapped a child in Vermont" (*Expensive People* 167).

In order to fulfill his parents' dreams of upward mobility, Richard is sent to the prestigious Johns Behemoth Boys' School. The choice is primarily important for the networking opportunities it provides to his parents. Richard notices that Johns Behemoth is like "an elegant nightmare concoction made by adults for adults, to further the aims and fantasies of adults, and what have children to do with such things?" (37). He realizes that what is being done for his own good is actually a calculated move, like every new investment of the family.

Johns Behemoth imposes extreme surplus repression on students. There is no place for play, but rather a totalizing mechanization process. The education offered prepares the boys for competitiveness, cheating, and alienation. Healthy expression of aggression is prohibited. Without any creative outlets either, the students exhibit deterioration of physical and psychological health. Richard explains that "I believe about thirty percent of my classmates were in analysis, a good many of them with the same man, Dr. Hugg, who specialized in disturbed adolescent boys" (28-29). The deterioration of the students' psychological health is the direct result of their restrictive environment:

> The limits will soon make themselves felt, for example, if the mental strains and stresses of the patient are caused, not merely by certain bad conditions in his job, in his neighborhood, in his social status, but by the very *nature* of the job, the neighborhood, the status itself – in their normal condition. Then making him normal for this condition would mean normalizing the strains and stresses, or to put it more brutally: making him capable of being sick, of living his sickness as health, without

> his noticing that he is sick precisely when he sees himself and is seen as healthy and normal. ("Aggressiveness" 188)

Since Johns Behemoth requires faultless results from students, studying is not enough. They have to eliminate every chance of failure by cheating. The repetitive and mind-numbing learning patterns are an aggression against the critical function of the mind. Richard has several classmates with addictions to medicine and alcohol. Therapy serves a certain function in this kind of organization: to individualize the problem rather than to show its source. It is a tactic for the maintenance of the prevailing system, since "[o]nce the personal discontent is isolated from the general unhappiness, once the universal concepts which militate against functionalization are dissolved into particular referents, the case becomes a treatable and tractable incident" (*ODM* 111).

Unsurprisingly, Richard first "exploded" after he received his IQ test results. Nada forced him to retake the standardized test in order to prove that he can surpass her in intelligence. Despite his visible struggle to attend school in a higher grade than his age, he is constantly made to exceed himself. No emotional intelligence or imaginative faculties have place in Richard's education, where everything is a mechanized process that contributes to his career. When he discovers his results he destroys all paperwork stored and the whole room, "vomiting over everything" (92).

The displacement of the problem continues when his parents decide to send him to the lecture on teenage sexuality (182). Richard leaves the room feeling nauseated and goes on to destroy a flowerbed (187), because he cannot handle the memories of the times his mother used him as an excuse to meet with her lovers. Instead of addressing the broader problems students face, the lecture focuses on the problem of sexuality. Under the façade of open-mindedness, the expert's lecture follows the tenets of the era. The performance principle

itself requires the expression of a controlled sexuality, which appears tolerant, but aims to diffuse other important issues students face.

Finally, Richard decides to buy a gun after he reads his mother's fiction, in an attempt to form a connection with her (155). In a way, he wants to execute what Nada cannot and would not fulfill, since her private refusal to conform remains on paper. She has to leave the suburbs to gain inspiration for her writing; then she returns and readjusts herself. Her stories reflect her surrounding society's hypocrisy, but it is as if they belong to a different realm. In Fernwood she is Nada, "nothing," because she is tied to her luxurious life.

In Nada's stories "The Sniper" and "The Molesters" she seems aware of the conformity middle-class life dictates and the socially situated reshaping of childhood experiences. Richard reads "The Molesters" as an acknowledgement of maternal guilt for his neglect, but Nada refuses to acknowledge the extent of her manipulation over her son. When the actual shootings start, she says that "What's crazy is that he shoots to miss" (203). Her wish for violence is followed by Richard, along with her wish for him to be completely free. Until the last moment, Nada is unaware of how she influenced Richard implicitly.

Artistic alienation provides a private realm for Nada, where she can "see" for herself. Marcuse explains that "[t]he artistic alienation is the conscious transcendence of the alienated existence -- a 'higher level' or mediated alienation" (*ODM* 60). Her obsession to be free from familial restrictions though, makes her blind to her surrounding reality, especially to her son's need for affection.

A closer look at "The Molesters," which is a short story Oates wrote and published separately, before the publication of *Expensive People*, shows the insight Nada gains in her fiction. In the three versions of the same incident, personal memory becomes doubtful. The girl "remembers" her molestation by a black man that happened a year ago through her

parents' interpretation. While the first version does not implicate that the incident was traumatic, the way she was treated after her parents discovered what happened aggravated the condition. She would have nightmares about the incident, constantly trying to remember what actually took place by the creek. In the third version it is the parents who are trying to remember what happened to her, even though they were obviously not there (150). In showing the consecutive versions, Nada exposes the effect of adult interference on their children's lives. The fact that the girl now has to see a doctor in order to work through her trauma shows that it is not the initial incident that matters anymore, but how it will be reinterpreted. Instead of writing a sentimentalized version of the story, Nada has the potential to create fiction that "calls the facts by their name and their reign collapses; fiction subverts everyday experience and shows it to be mutilated and false. But art has this magic power only as the power of negation. It can speak its own language only as long as the images are alive which refuse and refute the established order" (*ODM* 62).

The traumatic event in the short story "The Molesters" also parallels the event in Richard's life when his dog, Spark, died (123). Richard's parents replace Spark with another dog, after Spark is killed by a passing car, and pretend that nothing has changed, even though Richard notices the change in the dog's behavior. Even though it does not have the traumatic extent of the other experience, it is an example of how the reality of children can be manipulated by adults for "their own good". When she runs away again, Elwood tells Richard that "We want to understand her sickness and forgive her and make her well, Dickie" (87). In that way, "[t]he intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and impotent" (*ODM* 9). Still, both his parents follow the "Happy Consciousness": "the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods" (*ODM* 79). Nada is ambivalent, because as

Richard understands "she wanted only to live but she didn't know how, that was why she made a mess" (120). She finally deludes herself by proclaiming that she is "out of history":

> But I won't live any other way. This is heaven. This is heaven, I've found it, they don't torture you or back you in ovens here, in 1960- what more can we ask? Our ancestors tortured other people of where tortured themselves, or both. Well, I am Natashya Everett and I am out of history, I'm clean of its stink and crap, and there is no one to thank for it, no one but myself and good luck. (183)

Nada chooses to overlook inequality around her and participates in it. She does not read or watch the news, because she believes that "history is what is in this room, nothing more" (70). In that way she appropriates the countercultural sentiment but in an ahistorical context. Richard is not desensitized to the horrors of war yet, so when he sees the picture of a mutilated man in *Time*, he has an immediate reaction (70). However, in the one-dimensional society:

> [t]he photos which appear in the daily newspapers and in magazines with mass circulation, often in nice and glossy color, show rows of prisoners laid out or stood up for "interrogation," little children dragged through the dust behind armored cars, mutilated women. They are nothing new ("such things happen in a war"), but it is the setting that makes the difference: their appearance in the regular program, in togetherness with the commercials, sports, local politics, and reports on the social set. ("Aggressiveness" 195)

Marcuse explains that "the Happy Consciousness repels the connection" because war is displaced far away, "at the margin of the civilized world" (84). Oates and her character, Nada, have a different understanding of history, despite the obvious parallelisms between them. Oates understands and comments upon the amoralistic, individualistic consciousness that

overlooks the US imperialistic war in Vietnam. She also has the hindsight that her characters could not have. For example, the Detroit Riot which took place in 1967, while she was living in the area, was fuelled by financial and social inequality (Detroit Riot of 1967: *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*), which never troubled the suburbanites in *Expensive People*. The relevance to the novel is that Nada, even though she has the intellectual background, lives an untroubled life without paying attention to the inequality in her area.

In blinding her critical ability, Nada loses her essence and becomes "nothing." Mr. Body may or may not be the same person the Everett family meets every time they move to a new area, which looks exactly like the previous one. In the end, it does not matter because every place they move to is artificial; it requires uniformity of thought, nature resembles magazine advertisements in being completely constrained, people try to look artificial. Like the photoshoot of Duchessa of Vilesia in *Vogue* (82), beauty is connected to domination, it offers no transcendence.

Contemporary critics of American suburbs in *Expensive People*, like Moe Malinsky, the intellectual invited by Nada to the Village Great Books Discussion Club, can only attack the affluence and artificiality of such a society as the core of the problem. However, they neglect the fact that the suburbs are based on a kind of repression that cannot be overcome by material goods. Malinsky comments that suburban children look "type-cast, healthy, well-fed," with "no cares, no problems, no duties, no responsibilities, no sufferings, no thoughts" (172). He shows that he cannot grasp the core of the problem, neglecting the psychological impairment of such a life. Unsurprisingly, he cannot foresee Richard's explosion in the perfect suburbs.

After the shootings the interviews conducted show a façade of pluralism again. “People were interviewed, men at lunchtime, and housewives, someone from the City Council; a psychiatrist (*de rigueur*), the police commissioner (who was indignant)” (205). All opinions have the same gravity.

Richard confuses intimacy with violence, while he tries to follow his mother’s example to become completely free. As Marcuse notes in “Aggressiveness,” “The knife, the ‘blunt instrument,’ even the revolver are far more ‘part’ of the individual who uses them and they associate him more closely with his target” (199). He imagines that he frees himself from the one-dimensional society, breaking the glass that separates it from reality. In that way, Richard reproduces an unequal relationship of subordination. Having spent countless hours studying and competing with his older classmates, or sick in bed, the physical rush is to him an elevating experience, because he finally feels in control. Freedom is again a form of domination.

By the end of the narrative, Richard has confessed several times, but is never believed. In all psychoanalytic sessions he is treated as having a psychological disorder and the possibility that he actually killed his mother is never considered. Dr. Saskatoon wants to protect him from his own mind, his last traces of free will. The mad mind “summoning up physical disorders” (168) is another explanation separated from the social environment.

Chapter 4 The Performance of Normality in *Zombie*

Joyce Carol Oates often uses real events as the starting point of her fiction. She has mentioned that the idea for *Expensive People* came from a real incident of the time. For Oates, real-life tragedies or horrors can be emblematic of larger problems in American culture. She explains that "for the writer, emblematic material is most highly charged when it is only glancingly and obliquely suggested; once the idea presents itself, our instinct is to turn discreetly away" (Afterword in *Expensive People* 224). In *Zombie* (1995) she draws material from the case concerning a specifically notorious serial killer: Jeffrey Dahmer, also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal. Jeffrey Dahmer killed seventeen boys and young men mostly "poor and from an African American, Asian, or Latino" background (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2012). Oates's character Quentin P. and his crimes in the novel share characteristics with the actual serial killer Dahmer. Oates chose the material because it was a compelling case which stirred great controversy. The police were accused of neglecting to investigate Dahmer properly, missing several key clues that could have proven his guilt. But she was also clearly interested in creating a character and exploring his development as a human being with a complex personal history and not as a monstrous entity. She wished to examine the conditions that contributed to his actions and in that way she wished to reflect on the disturbing aspects of American society.

According to Brenda Daly, Oates presents "acts of violence not as isolated and meaningless but as the consequence of a collective failure of imagination, a failure to see 'them' as 'us'" (*Lavish Self-Divisions* 27). That was her public stance even in cases like 9/11. Oates mentions that "I inadvertently aroused the anger of a number of individuals who called in to protest my remark that I did not believe in 'evil'- that I thought that 'evil' is a

theological term, and not adequate to explain, nor even to suggest, psychological, social, and political complexities" (*In Rough Country* 354). She treats her literary topics in the same way, searching for clarity, individual thinking and understanding.

Herbert Marcuse and the Zombie Metaphor

The title *Zombie* is connected to popular horror culture. Zombies, the living-dead, have been used as a metaphor for mindless consumerism in several contexts. George A. Romero's original *Living Dead* trilogy (1968-1985) was particularly influential in making the Zombie one of the central metaphors of the wrongs of modern capitalist consumer society in popular culture. The living-dead, moving as a herd in an automated manner, have no conscience; they look as they used to before death, but their only purpose is to infiltrate the rest of the population and eat their brains. They give rise to unwelcome questions, such as the reason for their existence and the connection between them and the rest of the population, since they generally seem normal, but their bite is contagious and fatal. Oates's title is a relevant reference to the Dahmer case, to Quentin's experiments with lobotomy on his victims in order to turn them into zombies and also refers to his control by the apparatus. It is finally, a comment on American society and how it operates. Zombie is the metaphor of the administered subject, which follows a mass-formed consciousness and has lost the ability to think individually.

In "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man" (1963) Herbert Marcuse explains that "[i]n the social structure, the individual becomes the conscious and unconscious object of administration and obtains his freedom and satisfaction in his role as such an object" (47). The figure of the zombie will be approached through his concept of the new

administered subject as analyzed in "Obsolescence," where he recapitulates his reevaluation of Freud's theory of instincts and *One-Dimensional Man.*

In "Obsolescence," Marcuse summarizes his argument about the historical basis of Freud's theory of instincts. He also continues to explain how the mob mentality is created and how the notion of leadership has changed. The gap between the theory of psychoanalysis and social reality widens because of the change in the formation of the ego and the superego. He explains that "the formation of the ego," which acts according to the reality principle, and the superego, the ideal self that the performance principle (the prevailing reality principle) dictates, does no longer happen through the conflict with the Father. This conflict is instead historical "because it came to an end with the changes in industrial society in the interwar period" (46). The "advanced industrial society" has some new characteristics: the "transition from free to organized competition, concentration of power in the hands of an omnipresent technical, cultural and political administration, self-propelling mass production and consumption, subjection of previously private, asocial dimensions of existence to methodical indoctrination, manipulation, control" (46). The "asocial dimensions of existence" specifically are no longer private because of the invasion of mass culture, according to Marcuse.

Freud has stressed that the individual gives up the ego ideal and substitutes it with the group ideal "as embodied in the leader." But under the performance principle the ego regresses, as Marcuse notices. The "omnipresent technical, cultural and political administration" weakens consciousness and conscience, namely the ego's "power of negation": "the perfectly rational and progressive transfer of individual functions to the apparatus is accompanied by the irrational transfer of conscience and by the repression of consciousness" ("Obsolescence" 50).

There are two factors that repress consciousness. The first factor is "the immediate, external socialization of the ego," which guides surplus aggression against the "external enemies of the ego ideal." In that way, "the reality principle speaks en masse (then the rest of the ego conscience, everything that doesn't fit is deviation or identity crisis or personal trouble)" ("Obsolescence" 51). Consequently, the individual turns against those who do not conform to the contemporary performance principle. They also turn against themselves, when their problems and aspirations do not fit the performance principle. Therefore, "in the daily intake of information and propaganda, the images of the enemy are made concrete, immediate - human or rather inhuman….The enemy is thus not only more concrete than the abstraction which is his reality- he is also more flexible and fungible and can assimilate many familiar hated impersonations" (55). The surplus aggression which is generated by repression in all aspects of life and cannot be alleviated by controlled desublimation is channeled against a common enemy. Consequently, according to Marcuse, the root of the problem is not addressed and the productive apparatus is maintained. Additionally, feelings of entrapment often give rise to paranoia and conspiracy theories by an all-encompassing apparatus.

The second factor that represses consciousness, "the control and management of free time," offers only the outlet of repressive desublimation mainly through excessive consumerism and the illusion of innumerable choices. Zombies are central symbols for this idea in popular culture. The large variety of choices is predetermined and limiting because it generates and satisfies repressive needs. The individual who satisfies only his or her repressive needs through excessive consumerism is akin to the zombie figure.

According to Marcuse, Freud's explanation about the formation of masses around a strong leader is not adequate to describe new social phenomena. He stresses that "the authority of the prevailing productive apparatus" is not embodied in one person, but rather

diffused throughout the system "which, once set in motion and moving efficiently in the set direction, engulfs the leaders and the led – without, however, eliminating the radical differences between them, that is, between the masters and the servants" (54). The totality of this system leads to "an obsolescence of the role and autonomy of the economic and political subject" (59). Consequently, the ego is formed by the masses "which depend on the objective, reified leadership of the technical and political administration. In the mental structure, this process, is supported by the decline of the father image, the separation of the ego ideal from the ego and its transference to a collective ideal, and a mode of desublimation which intensifies social control of libidinal energy" (59). In this society of total reification the individual is zombified, since he or she "becomes the conscious and unconscious object of administration and obtains his freedom and satisfaction in his role as such an object" (47). Through repressive desublimation, repressive needs are constantly created and satisfied through consumption. The subject works to produce and to consume products that satisfy his or her repressive needs, leading to more repression, to a state of unfreedom.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse explains in more detail how repressive desublimation contributes to the increase of aggressiveness:

> According to Freud, strengthening of sexuality (libido) would necessarily involve weakening of aggressiveness, and vice versa. However, if the socially permitted and encouraged release of libido would be that of partial and localized sexuality, it would be tantamount to an actual compression of erotic energy, and this desublimation would be compatible with the growth of unsublimated as well as sublimated forms of aggressiveness. The latter is rampant throughout contemporary industrial society. (78)

Moreover, he stresses that in the advanced industrial society "the capitalist development has altered the structure and function of these two classes in such a way that

they no longer appear to be agents of historical transformation. An overriding interest in the preservation and improvement of the institutional status quo unites the former antagonists in the most advanced areas of contemporary society" (*ODM* xii-xiii). The individual who operates under the collective ideal is dangerously close to the zombie figure when he or she derives satisfaction through the objectification of other people that have only utilitarian value. The zombie-citizen is the center of its very small universe, with explosions of aggressiveness whenever something does not fit the ego ideal. This universe is all-consuming:

> As the project unfolds, it shapes the entire universe of discourse and action, intellectual and material culture. In the medium of technology, culture, politics, and the economy merge into an omnipresent system which swallows up or repulses all alternatives. The productivity and growth potential of this system stabilize the society and contain technical progress within the framework of domination. (*ODM* xvi)

These specific works of Marcuse were published in the 1960s and refer to the advanced industrial society of his contemporary Cold War era. The future in *Zombie* appears far grimmer. The Cold War period prepared society for the acceptance of total administration. In the society of *Zombie*, the employment of control methods that were prominent in totalitarian regimes are used in advanced industrial societies indistinctively. Control over every aspect of life is sought after, not opposed to, and regulates all aspects of life.

Quentin P_ as the Perfect Zombie

Quentin, or Q_ P_, is a thirty-one-year old man; he presents himself as being average in everything. His sentence for attempting to molest a minor has been suspended and it is slowly revealed that the reason he managed to avoid imprisonment lies mainly in his family's status and connections. His weekly routine consists of meeting with his probation officer, his

therapist, and his therapy group as part of his rehabilitation process (4). He has been prescribed medication to keep the undesired symptoms under control and to a greater extent, he is sedated in order to avoid making his acquaintances uncomfortable. Little by little, he exposes his thoughts to the reader, which get more disturbing and eventually terrifying. One aspect of his thoughts that make them disturbing is the fact that they are commonplace and everyday thoughts and sentiments; the serial killer is "one of us."

Quentin has fantasies of internal control to balance his administrated reality. He mentions for example, a clock he has broken the hands off in order to create his "inside time," as he calls it (6). In that way, he detaches himself from his surroundings and becomes the center of his universe, where he is powerful and omnipotent. But the truth is that he has great trouble assuming control over his life and this is why he resorts to such destructive measures. In many instances he speaks of himself in the third person. Important life decisions, like his enrolment in Dale County Technological College are introduced in the passive voice. "It has been decided" that Quentin would study engineering by his parents. His father specifically dreams for Quentin to become a scientist like himself. In the advanced industrial society, the family unit prepares its members for "a system which determines a priori the product of the apparatus as well as the operations of servicing and extending it" (*ODM* xv). The productive apparatus "determines not only the socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes, but also individual needs and aspirations." Consequently, there is no space for "opposition between the private and public existence, between individual and social needs" (*ODM* xv). Quentin recounts different types of engineering; he does not mention "social engineering" but it is hinted at in the ironic repetition of the various types of engineering.

Furthermore, Quentin feels completely defenseless against not only his family, especially his father and sister, but also his doctors and probation officer. He often mentions

that he knows they are writing reports about his progress and in the course of the narrative he becomes more paranoid because of this sense of helplessness. For example, he thinks that he is being spied on behind secret transparent glass at his group therapy or deriving his visit to the dentist.

The way he presents himself to the public is calculated and follows a façade of obedience as in his statement: "I never contradict. I am in agreement with you as you utter your words of wisdom" (3). He has learned how to behave in order to get certain reactions; in a way, he has "hacked" normality, the performance principle. Everyone under different circumstances manipulates the performance principle one way or another to generate certain reactions. In some instances, Quentin does so simply to feel more comfortable in an environment he perceives as unwelcoming. Along the process, he starts manipulating his behavior in order to inflict harm, though. After a point, he manages to master a new handwriting and assume different identities deliberately.

Despite his complaints, he does enjoy his work as a caretaker. Working in a student house that belongs to his family, he is able to "open the door of any room in the house" with his master-key (11). It is his turn to derive pleasure from being the administrator, as he has authority over the international graduate students. The racial reference is clear because he is the only white person in the building. The collective ideal does not differ much from his racist sentiments: Quentin's father has repeatedly mentioned that tenants from "India, China, Pakistan, Africa" are preferred tenants because "[t]hey are shy & more polite than American students & they pay their rent on time & don't notice things American students would notice & don't trash their rooms like American students" (12). Quentin's father wants subservient tenants that would accept changes and intrusion in their private space without questions. "The politics of mass society begin at home, with the shrinking of the ego and its subjection to the

collective ideal" ("Obsolescence" 60), suppressing the individual's conscience and sustaining similar sentiments.

Dr. P_'s sentiment appears harmless but Quentin clearly follows a similar procedure when he chooses his victims. His selection process is the following: "A safer specimen for a ZOMBIE would be somebody from out of town. A hitch-hiker or a drifter or a junkie (if in good condition not skinny & strung out or sick with AIDS). Or from the black projects downtown. Somebody nobody gives a shit for. Somebody should never have been born" (28). His zombie has to be physically attractive but also someone unwanted. He chooses to direct his surplus aggression against people who do not fit the ego ideal, because he knows that they will probably not be searched for. This calculated choice helps him avoid arrest until the end of the narrative. In kidnapping someone who "should never have been born" he reveals deep-seated beliefs about lives that are worthless, a distinction made by an "operationalist" doctrine. Operationalist language when used in everyday life, equates the subject with the function. This process leads to the eventual dehumanization of the subject, which is viewed only in terms of its usefulness and expendability (*ODM* 141).

Similarly, to Quentin his specimens are not fully human, but objects that exist for his satisfaction. They are reduced to their strong bodies, dark skin and eyes. Since the ego ideal is dictated by the performance principle, Quentin turns against men who are different from and similar to him. The "mad scientist" and the zombie meet: he evaluates the victims like lab rats, according to how suitable they are for his experiments, and at the same time he wishes to lobotomize them by repeating the metaphorical lobotomy which is being imposed on him.

Quentin deludes himself in saying that he is "a man who is 'gay' & does not advertise the fact but is not ashamed of it either, & guilty of nothing because of it either" (156). One

would expect that since he expresses this openly and because he has access to a variety of porn films and magazines, he would have turned less aggressive and resentful. Marcuse explains that:

> According to Freud, strengthening of sexuality (libido) would necessarily involve weakening of aggressiveness, and vice versa. However, if the socially permitted and encouraged release of libido would be that of partial and localized sexuality, it would be tantamount to an actual compression of erotic energy, and this desublimation would be compatible with the growth of unsublimated as well as sublimated forms of aggressiveness. (*ODM* 78)

In other words, the ego ideal that he has internalized only allows him to express himself in a secretive manner. Inspite of what he says, he is still deeply ashamed of himself. He has to keep feeling ashamed in order to keep consuming. The "controlled liberalization which increases satisfaction with the offerings of society" (57) does not help him address his anger. But Quentin has a reached a point where he purposefully hacks normality in order to receive the desired reactions from his surroundings and continues his operations secretly, instead of expressing openly his opposition and seeking resolution with his family and doctor. Because he is unable to direct his anger to the institutions that have victimized him, he directs his unsublimated aggressiveness to his victims. In the end, the only way he can now derive pleasure is from the torment of his victims and the sense of absolute control over them. He dreams of the day when he would have his own zombie that will never judge him when he looks into his eyes.

While Quentin equips his laboratory in the basement and keeps body parts of his victims as mementos in his room, he still meets with his psychiatrist, Dr. E_, every week. Their sessions do not lead anywhere, until the point when Quentin starts lying about his

dreams. Psychoanalytic therapy "is faced with a situation in which it seems to help the Establishment rather than the individual" ("Obsolescence" 44) because it is still based on the premise that the ego can transcend the regressive tendencies of contemporary society. It promotes in that way the identification with the masses and its one-dimensional thinking. In that sense, it is based on "individual needs and individual potentialities which have become outdated in the social and political development" (60). The obsolescence of the approach does not help Quentin address his pressing issues, but rather lulls him deeper into a state of apathy. Every session ends with the prescription of medication. Practices like lobotomy might be outdated, but medicine has a similar effect on Quentin. He takes pills to wake up, go to sleep and contain his self-destructive tendencies. Medicine might keep him under control, but also makes him increasingly dependent on the wishes of his family, peers and society.

Ironically, the only time the doctor notices "a *healthy* tone" to his skin is when he is planning the abduction of "Squirrel" (115), because it is something that gives him the illusion of control in his "inside time." Quentin looks healthy, therefore he is; his normal behavior equals a balanced inner life. This is also how his probation officer treats him, when he only checks if his room looks clean and tidy. Still, the hierarchy remains, the way he is treated by the legal system, the police and the student house are all indicative of his privilege. The same system that helps him stay out of prison also enslaves him.

Quentin's selection process is similar to Dr. M_K_'s, a Nobel Prize winner and Dr. P_'s mentor. As it is later revealed, "Dr. K_ had led a team of scientists who engaged in secret experiments for the Atomic Energy Commission" (171-172). The radiation experiments took place between 1953 and 1957, in the heart of the Cold War. Specifically "[i]n one experiment, radioactive milk was fed to thirty-six mentally retarded children at a school in Bethesda, Maryland. In another, the testicles of prisoners at several Virginia universities were exposed

to 'ionizing radiation'" (171). The incident in the novel refers to the actual exposure of the Atomic Energy Commission's secret experiments in 1994. The subjects of the experiments were chosen among people who could not have resisted. Quentin's father is shocked and instantly assumes that Dr. K_'s reputation was marred after his death, when he cannot defend himself (172). The Machiavellian logic that the means justifies the end prevails when human life is treated as expendable. Marcuse comments on the Cold War era policies that predicated the toleration of such practices:

> In this general necessity, guilt has no place. One man can give the signal that liquidates hundreds and thousands of people, then declare himself free from all pangs of conscience, and live happily ever after. The antifascist powers who beat fascism on the battlefields reap the benefits of the Nazi scientists, generals, and engineers; they have the historical advantage of the late-comer. *What begins as the horror of the concentration camps turns into the practice of training people for abnormal conditions -- a subterranean human existence and the daily intake of radioactive nourishment*. [emphasis added] (*ODM* 79)

Therefore, the case is not anymore only about "training people for abnormal positions" but about forgetting or concealing the past and using one-dimensional language to justify crimes against humanity. When non-consenting humans become specimens, the distinction between lives that have more value than others is evident. Marcuse defines the Happy Consciousness that has become the norm in late capitalism:

> Obviously, in the realm of the Happy Consciousness, guilt feeling has no place, and the calculus takes care of conscience. When the whole is at stake, there is no crime except that of rejecting the whole, or not defending it. Crime, guilt, and guilt feeling become a private affair. Freud revealed in the psyche of the individual the crimes of

> man-kind, in the individual case history the history of the whole. This fatal link is successfully suppressed. Those who identify themselves with the whole, who are installed as the leaders and defenders of the whole can make mistakes, but they cannot do wrong -- they are not guilty. They may become guilty again when this identification no longer holds, when they are gone. (*ODM* 82)

The Happy Consciousness is perpetuated by the media that shows inextricably and with the use of the same language famine, war and the weather forecast:

> On channel six there's naked black corpses in a dump somewhere in Africa. On channel nine there's bawling children in some bombed-out hospital in this place called Bosnia. & fading to an ad *This is your governor speaking*. On channel eleven an ad for a van bouncing over a rocky desert landscape. On channel twelve the weather news Michigan & Great Lakes region continued high temperatures. (*Zombie* 135)

This example of personalized language ("This is your governor speaking") creates the illusion of identification that Marcuse describes in *One-Dimensional Man*:

> The same familiarity is established through personalized language, which plays a considerable role in advanced communication. It is "your" congressman, "your" highway, "your" favorite drugstore, "your" newspaper; it is brought "to you," it invites "you," etc. In this manner, superimposed, standardized, and general things and functions are presented as "especially for you," It makes little difference whether or not the individuals thus addressed believe it. Its success indicates that it promotes the self-identification of the individuals with the functions which they and the others perform. (92)

Finally, Quentin's latest crime is the abduction of "Squirrel" or Jamie, a teenage boy who lives close to his grandmother. The plan has to be perfectly calculated because Squirrel is not like his previous specimens; he is the only one who will be sought after his disappearance, and the only one whose absence would gain media attention. Quentin's outburst "*Why should he be alive?*" at the hot-line announcement puts into question hierarchies about human lives (175).

In the last scene, Quentin has dinner with his older sister, Junie, and her friends. He has taken sedatives before in order to keep himself under control and appear normal. By the 1990s most elements of the counterculture have been incorporated to the mainstream. Quentin is able to integrate elements of this lifestyle in his performance of normality in order to appeal to Junie's friends. He knows what to reply to his sister's friend, Lucille, when she asks about the "meaning" of his bracelet, a memento of Squirrel (180). He is clever enough to study people's weaknesses to manipulate them. In "typing" them into categories he turns his bracelet, a memento of death, into bait, leaving open the possibility that Lucille will be his next zombie attempt.

Conclusion

This thesis explored how Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates turned to the gothic tradition in fiction in order to analyze the changing perceptions of normality in American society. In the 1950s and early 1960s "normality" was dictated by domestic ideology, which reinforced restrictive gender roles and called for a regressive conception of the family unit. A return to traditional family values and the idea of a strong family as a microcosm of a strong nation were meant to help the US defend itself against "the Red Scare." In this era, Shirley Jackson introduced characters that tested the limits of these traditional values. The limits and double standards of the domestic ideal were made particularly evident in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Eleanor has to die in order for balance to be restored, because there is literally no place for her to exist. She realizes that she neither wants to marry and become a housewife, nor lead a bohemian life like Theodora.

We Have Always Lived in the Castle shows the new generation's break from family and patriarchal authority. Merricat's story foreshadows countercultural resistance towards the norms and morality of the previous generation. In the novel, the family unit is no longer the main factor of socialization, an idea also stressed by Herbert Marcuse in his philosophical writings of the same era. The novel hints at the rise of youth culture in the late 1950s that gave visibility and identity to the "teenager" as a new category, and foregrounds the parents' fear of their baby-boomer sons and daughters. The American counterculture movement was not in full bloom when Jackson wrote *Castle*, but many of the new norms and demands are here: self-sufficiency, opposition to the previous generation's norms, "opting-out" from the antagonistic society, power to imagination and resistance to the rationalistic and functionalizing aspects of the dominant culture. However, the sisters' self-segregation does

not have an effect on the outside world: they haunt their own house, are disempowered from contributing to substantial change and they are finally treated like spirits by the villagers. Through the use of Gothic tropes, *Castle* foresees the rise and fall of the counterculture whereby groups were either self-segregated or re-integrated into mass culture.

My research initially focused on the family unit. Then through research, a theory that would offer a wider scope on American society was needed. Herbert Marcuse's reflections on the one-dimensional society were very important for my analysis in the following chapters.

Joyce Carol Oates focused on the wrong turn that she believed the American Dream had taken in the postwar era. *Expensive People* makes evident the transfer of authority and obligation from the family unit to the peer group, media and mass culture. For professional adults, like Richard's father, there is the highly demanding corporate culture. Nada faces the problems of autonomy that many women of her generation had to face, but she persists on a materialistic and individualistic version of the American Dream. She "recognizes [herself] in [her] commodities" that satisfy repressive needs (*ODM* 9). A new definition for being normal is made evident: to be functional in the antagonistic system. Marcuse's thought was very important to highlight the change in consciousness. The premise of this system is not to be questioned; only the individual has to be cured.

In *Zombie* Oates explores the complete reification of human relations in American culture. The counterculture has become part of late capitalism. The one-dimensional society needs technologies of constant surveillance and experts to regulate the individuals. In this society, if someone is able to perform normality like Quentin, then he or she has a great possibility of passing as normal. The initial argument that normality is socially and historically situated was confirmed. My research shows that the harm inflicted, psychological and physical, lies to a great extent in persisting on norms that are redundant. Marcuse's

theory of the obsolescence of the basis of Freudian psychoanalysis showed that the theoretical tools that examine social reality have to correspond to the changes. This has become more difficult because of the fast pace of changes in contemporary societies.

Jackson and Oates employed variations of the contemporary gothic and different metaphors for the new subject. Domesticity, houses and family disputes are central in the American gothic. Jackson chose to write in this style to highlight the problems the domestic ideal and the feminine mystique posed to women in her era. Cold War outcasts are presented as spirits and witches. This can be seen as closely related to McCarthyism which directed "witch-hunts" to non-conforming aspects of society.

Oates employs suburban gothic elements in *Expensive People,* where consumerism and conformity are presented as evil. Richard is at least self-reflexive, in contrast to Quentin. Richard's compulsive eating is a previous step leading to the zombie figure. *Zombie* as a horror novel with graphic violence does not lose quality in presenting the zombified individual in late capitalism. The negative vision of total surveillance in *Zombie* leaves no space for an optimistic evaluation of the future. However, the integration of the various countercultures into the mass culture makes progressive aspects of them become part of everyday life, which has led to positive social change.

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